

***Gaudium et spes*: Impulses of the Spirit for an Age of Globalization**

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Abstract. — Guided by the metaphor ‘impulses of the Spirit’ (*Gaudium et spes* §§11 and 92), we aim to contribute to a renewed reception of Vatican II’s final document, especially among the new generation of (moral) theologians. Commenting upon its subtitle ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’, we first introduce the originality of its style, perspective and method. Next, we propose a pneumatological approach to the text in order to avoid the polarizing interpretations which tend to oppose creation (Modern autonomy) and Christology (tradition). Finally, we illustrate the enduring relevance of *Gaudium et spes* for Catholic social teaching in a context of globalization.

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” (Jn 3:8)

Introduction

The expression ‘impulses of the Spirit’ [*impulsiones Spiritus*] appears in the Latin title of §11 of *Gaudium et Spes* as a synonym of the famous expression ‘signs of the times’.² The metaphor ‘impulse’ comes from the domain of physics, where impulse is defined as ‘momentum change’. As such it designates a singular turning-point at which a dynamic power can bring about something new. The expression aptly evokes how in *Gaudium et spes* the Church considers the changing world by searching for catalysts of humanization. At the same time the document itself embodies an expression of a threshold moment in the Church. In this article we will begin by examining more generally how the style, perspective and method of *Gaudium et spes* are characterised by a certain momentum – commenting upon its subtitle ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’. Next, we will propose, inspired by the expression ‘impulses of the Spirit’, a pneumatological interpretation of the text as a way beyond the polarisation which characterizes the reception history of the document. Finally, we will offer some concrete illustrations of the enduring significance of *Gaudium et spes* by referring briefly to a few impulses in the area of social teaching which hold relevance for a globalizing world.

¹ This article originated in the context of an international conference *The Church in Dialogue. Vatican II Today*, organized in Leuven/Brussels/Louvain-la-Neuve, 26-28 October 2014. Being two young moral theologians, we were asked to introduce *Gaudium et spes* to an audience mainly consisting of theology students born long after Vatican II. The aim was to share our own enthusiasm, inviting this new generation to (re)discover *Gaudium et spes* and its enduring relevance for the future.

² We found only one article, which took the former expression as its point of departure: Drew Christiansen, “Impulses of the Spirit: The servant church after Vatican II,” *America* 207:9 (2012): 23-26.

I. A Change in Style, Perspective and Method

1. 'Pastoral constitution': A New Style

Gaudium et spes, the final document issued by the Second Vatican Council, best reflects the original inspiration of John XXIII to lead the Church through a period of *aggiornamento*. The pope aimed at a retrieval of the rich tradition of the Church, in dialogue with contemporary trends in society and culture, in order to improve its pastoral activities in the context of a rapidly changing world. But not everyone was prepared for these winds of change: draft versions of *Gaudium et spes* were the object of heated discussion over four years, as is evident in the final text.³ To this day there is no single agreed-upon interpretation of the document within the Church community.

In the bull *Humanae salutis* (1961) convoking the Council, John XXIII explained that he considered it his urgent duty to call the Church together to reflect on how it could contribute more effectively to the solutions for the problems of the modern age. For many Council Fathers, it was far from self-evident at the outset that this venerable assembly should talk about all manner of worldly issues. Was their core task not to talk about God and spiritual matters and to leave the all-too-human aspects of daily life to the world to resolve themselves?⁴ Nevertheless, by 1965 a consensus had developed for the need for a Christian teaching about the human person (Part I of *Gaudium et spes*), as well as regarding the importance of devoting specific chapters to family, culture, the economy, peace and the international political community (Part II).

There was likewise discussion of the status of the draft text. Given that the topics addressed – such as culture, the economy, and war – were ones about which “Catholic teaching is contingent and changeable ... rather than unchangeable and certain, as is the case for example with sexual morality [sic]”⁵, some participants argued that the document should be given the status of only a ‘message’ or ‘letter’ – or at most a declaration. But Paul VI and the majority of the bishops took the view that the term ‘constitution’ was appropriate, further qualified as a ‘pastoral’ constitution. The document was thus given the highest level of authority, while at the same time the adjective left room for interpretation: is this a less solemn document than a *dogmatic* constitution such as *Dei Verbum*, or only of a different genre?⁶

2. 'On the Church in the modern world': A Dialogical Perspective

³ Alain Thomasset, *La morale de Vatican II* (Paris: Médiaspaul, 2013), 7. For the historical genesis of the text, see Mathijs Lamberigts, “*Gaudium et spes*: A Council in Dialogue with the World,” in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel*, ed. J. Verstraeten, BETL 208 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 17-40.

⁴ In some circles a similar objection, arguing that the pope should not intervene in political and scientific debates, has been voiced against the recent encyclical *Laudato si'*.

⁵ Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica*, Rediscovering Vatican II (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 35.

⁶ See Joseph Famerée (ed.), *Vatican II comme style: l'herméneutique théologique du concile*, Unam Sanctam Nouvelle Série 4 (Paris: Cerf, 2012).

After having reflected on itself (*ad intra*) in *Lumen Gentium*, the Church directed its focus in *Gaudium et spes* to its role *ad extra*. The opening sentence of this document immediately conveys a sense that it is ground-breaking in the way in which the Church situates itself in relation to the world:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. (§1)⁷

This expression of an intimate bond and solidarity with humanity and its history implies a new position for the Church. That this shift did not occur without resistance or debate is also evident from the way in which the title evolved throughout the writing process: only in the final version was “The Church in the World” chosen instead of “The Church and the World”. The Church no longer speaks *about* or *to* the world, but rather *in* the world. Or, as Peter Hebblethwaite summed it up:

The Kingdom, or better, the Reign of God, that horizon toward which Christians consciously move, was to be discovered in solidarity with others, not in separation from them. Normally it would be unnecessary to congratulate a human grouping on discovering that it belonged to the human race; but in case of the Roman Catholic Church, which, especially with its Catholic social doctrine, had talked *at* people rather than *with* them, it was an important shift of attitude.⁸

An important element highlighting this openness is the fact that the document seeks to address “all men of good will” (§2), following the example set by John XXIII. During the years of the Council, he wrote *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the first encyclical addressed to an audience beyond simply the members of the Catholic Church. To date, *Gaudium et spes* is the only conciliar document that explicitly addresses the whole world.⁹ As a whole, it shows how the Church seeks to be of service to humanity, by working together with all people (§3).

3. ‘The signs of the times in the light of the Gospel’: A New Method

John XXIII’s dream of a Church that does not place itself above or against the world but advocates cooperation and dialogue requires that the Church take contemporary developments seriously, resulting in a humility and willingness to listen before proceeding to make judgments and formulate doctrinal positions.¹⁰ In the convocation bull for the Council (1961), John XXIII introduced the notion of ‘signs of the times’. In *Mater et Magistra*, the social encyclical issued that same year, there was already a notable turn towards a more inductive

⁷ For all ecclesial documents in this article, we use the official translation at <http://www.vatican.va/>.

⁸ Peter Hebblethwaite, “The Popes and Politics: Shifting Patterns in Catholic Social Doctrine,” in *Official Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. C. E. Curran and R. A. McCormick, Readings in Moral Theology 5 (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 271. All italics in our article are ours.

⁹ A strong example of dialogical capacity is, for example, the extensive, non-judgmental approach to modern atheism in §19-21.

¹⁰ Cf. Hebblethwaite, “The Popes and Politics,” 268.

method; in the “practical suggestions” it cites Joseph Cardijn’s method of ‘see, judge, act’, whereby one first reviews the current situation and then “forms a judgment on it in the light of ... [social] principles.”¹¹

The notion that the Church must discern the signs of the times attests to a historical consciousness. This stands in contrast to the deductive method used in established moral theology of the pre-conciliar era. In the traditional worldview, reality was regarded as an ‘eternal and unchangeable’ order, founded on universal principles (the ‘natural law’) laid down by God, the ‘designer of the universe’, the ‘rational Creator’.¹² The consequence was “a dogmatic, legalistic and disciplinary tendency that operates via prohibitions against the errors of the world.”¹³ By contrast, *Gaudium et spes* represents a more inductive approach, taking developments in the world as a starting point, based on a more pragmatic and pastoral attitude to the world.

The expression “reading the signs of the times,” however, cannot be reduced to ‘drawing moral lessons from history’. There is a theology underlying the phrase, one that resonates with the dialogical understanding of revelation found in *Dei verbum*, in which the revelation of divine truth is understood as a “historical process that unfolds in the Church under the *impulse of the Spirit*.”¹⁴ Since the signs of the times cannot be reduced to purely worldly realities but must be seen as messages from God, theology, according to Marie-Dominique Chenu, is a “reflection on the contemporary human situation and on God’s involvement therein.”¹⁵ This inductive method means that “faith finds its nourishment in reading history.”¹⁶ The theological foundation for this is the theology of creation: the autonomy of the world is recognised and received positively (cf. §36). The world is good because God created it and brings about salvation in it (cf. §2). Or, as Erik Borgman puts it: “Recognizing the signs of the times means finding the places where one can see that the reign of God is in the process of breaking through, seeing where that breakthrough is at stake and where the struggle to bring it about is being carried on.”¹⁷

What exactly the relationship is between salvation and world history was the subject of heated debate. From 1963 onward, there was an optimistic tendency to understand ‘the

¹¹ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, 1961, §263.

¹² Michael J. Schuck, *That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals, 1740-1989* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 67-68.

¹³ Alain Thomasset, *La morale de Vatican II*, ed. E. Maurice, Vatican II pour tous (Paris: Médiaspaul, 2013), 14.

¹⁴ Thomasset, *La morale de Vatican II*, 20.

¹⁵ Chenu quoted in Erik Borgman, *Want de plaats waarop je staat is heilige grond: God als onderzoeksprogramma* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2008), 63.

¹⁶ Marie-Dominique Chenu, “Les signes des temps: Réflexion théologique,” in *Vatican II: L’Eglise dans le monde de ce temps*, Tome II: *Commentaires*, ed. Y. M.-J. Congar and M. Peuchmaurd, Unam Sanctam 65b (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 212: “D’un bout à l’autre de la première partie de la Constitution, référence est ainsi faite à l’histoire, non pour y chercher des exemples illustrant une doctrine, mais comme à la matière même de la réflexion théologique sur la relation de l’Église et du monde. La foi se nourrit ici à lire l’histoire.”

¹⁷ Borgman, *Want de plaats*, 68: “De tekenen van de tijd herkennen, betekent de plaatsen vinden waar aan het licht komt dat het koninkrijk van God bezig is aan te breken, zien waar deze doorbraak op het spel staat en de strijd erom gevoerd wordt.” See also Thomasset, *La morale de Vatican II*, 37: “C’est précisément le lieu déjà touché par la grâce où se joue l’histoire du salut et où cette histoire du salut se déploie.”

sign of the times' as 'vox temporis, vox Dei' ('the voice of the times is the voice of God'). This position was met with vehement criticism from a Protestant observer at the Council, Lukas Vischer, whose view was supported by a critical minority. Vischer noted that the way in which John XXIII used the term diverged from the Biblical passage in Mt. 16:3, in which this expression had eschatological implications that suggested anything but confidence in human capacity. On the contrary: Jesus remarks that humanity does not understand the signs of the times. Vischer raises pertinent questions: why would our generation be better able to recognize the signs of the times than Jesus' contemporaries? Does Jesus' apocalyptic tone not tell us that salvation is not simply a natural extension of our history? As regards a version of the text from 1964, Vischer concluded: "if you give too innocent a picture of the world, you cannot mediate any real hope."¹⁸ A bit more nuance was needed, but when it came to the crucial clarification, no compromise was found. In the end, this meant that in the final version of the Constitution, this highly influential expression "signs of the times" appears only once (§4), to which is added "in the light of the Gospel". There are, however, three other allusions to the concept, with slightly different connotations (cf. §§ 11, 44 & 82). Nevertheless, the entire text is clearly permeated by the experiential theological method that John XXIII sought to foster by means of this concept.

II. Impulses of the Spirit: A Pneumatological Perspective beyond One-Sided Interpretations

1. Paradox and Polarization

The expression 'the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel' is a compromise, as evidenced by the debate during the final session of the Council about the question of how Biblical inspiration should be incorporated into the text. The proponents of the inductive method took as their starting point contemporary experience and a phenomenological description of the world that would be comprehensible to all human beings, and upon which faith would then shine its light. Critics argued that given the ambiguity of history, we would do better to start from the traditional truths of faith, i.e. deductively, from an explicitly theological starting point. The two different approaches (respectively from human experience and [Biblical] tradition) can both be found in the final text of *GS*. This twofold perspective can be seen, for instance, in the structure of the chapters in Part I. In each case, the starting point is a theme within the theology of creation – the original goodness of the world – which is then linked to contemporary human experiences and concepts. Next, there is a diagnosis of what is wrong ('sin'), and each chapter ends with a Christological conclusion professing that Christ saves the world in order that it may reach its final destination.

Many readers latched on to the fact that *GS* is a compromise text in order to select those elements that fit in well with their own interpretative framework.¹⁹ 'Progressives'

¹⁸ Cited in Richard Schenk, "*Officium signa temporum perscrutandi*: New Encounters of Gospel and Culture in the Context of the New Evangelization," in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in the Light of the Gospel*, ed. J. Verstraeten, BETL 208 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 167-203: 178. For the background of the conciliar debates about 'the signs of the times', we base ourselves on Schenk's text.

¹⁹ For an overview of the main tensions in the texts and in the consequent opposing tendencies in its interpretation, see Ormond Rush, "Unresolved Tensions within *Gaudium et Spes*: Agenda for a Contemporary Christian Anthropology," in *Being Human: Groundwork for a Theological Anthropology*

applaud, for instance, the fact that §36 emphasizes the autonomy of creation. Indeed, the Church recognizes in a radical manner the freedom and responsibility of the world which is so close to the heart of modern people.²⁰ But in their enthusiasm, these interpreters forget to read further: at the end of the same paragraph, 36, the autonomy of temporal affairs is relativized, in the sense that it is deemed rightful only when seen in relation to God. Modern autonomy is not embraced uncritically; paragraph 37 cites Paul: “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). Because of sin, all human activity “must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ’s cross and resurrection” (§ 37). Here ‘conservatives’ can declare victory and affirm that the core of *Gaudium et spes* is in fact §22: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”²¹ Is the truth about humankind thus the monopoly of the Church after all? If one reads that paragraph right to the end, however, one sees that: “This holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way.”²² And further on, we read that “the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery” (§22).²³

It is a painful irony that the Council which strove for greater unity led to a decades-long fruitless struggle between ‘progressives’ and ‘conservatives’.²⁴ Both defended one part of the

for the 21st Century, eds. D. Kirchhoffer, R. Horner, P. McArdle (Melbourne: Mosaic Books/Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 35-46. For an elaborate study of its reception, see Hans-Joachim Sander, *Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von Heute Gaudium et spes*, in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. P. Hünemann and B.J. Hilberath, vol. 4 (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 583-886, esp.: 835-864. For a case study of one specific debate, see, e.g., Johan De Tavernier and Axel Liégeois, *Natuur en/of persoon? Betekenis, receptie en doorwerking van het debat over Gaudium et spes 51*, in *Vaticanum II: geschiedenis of inspiratie? Theologische opstellen over het tweede Vaticaans concilie*, ed. M. Lamberigts and L. Kenis (Antwerp: Halewijn, 2013), 107-126.

²⁰ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, §§ 16 (on conscience) and 17 (on freedom).

²¹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, § 45.

²² This is a reference to *Lumen Gentium*, §16.

²³ For a striking illustration of truncated readings of *Gaudium et spes*, one may compare the journals *Concilium* en *Communio* (US edition), e.g., in their thematic issues devoted to the theological-anthropological notion of ‘natural law’. Cf. Andrés Torres Queiruga, “Natural Law and Theology in a Secular Context,” *Concilium IRT* no. 3 (2010): 26-35, 30 (quoting the first lines of §36) – in the articles of this issue there is no reference to §22 at all; in *Communio*, there is no trace of §36, while almost every author refers to the first part of §22: cf., e.g., Tracey Rowland, “Natural Law: From Neo-Thomism to Nuptial Mysticism,” *Communio ICR* 35 (2008): 374-396, 378.

For another example of the latter strategy, see also J. Brian Benestad, “Doctrinal Perspectives on the Church in the Modern World,” *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. M. L. Lamb, M. Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 147-164. Benestad leaves out paragraph 36 in his detailed overview of the document, centering his interpretation around paragraph 22. Interestingly he quotes the final lines of § 22, but he considers them as a ‘logical addition’ (cf. *ibid.*, 155), meant to highlight the passivity of humankind in a Christocentric anthropology.

²⁴ In his overview of the reception of *Gaudium et spes* Massimo Faggioli remarks that the polarization, which we discuss in our article, is a typically Western reaction. In the Churches of Latin America, Africa and Asia, we find different approaches. This is “one of the examples of a “diversified reception” of the council according to the culture of the local Church.” Massimo Faggioli, “The Battle over ‘Gaudium et Spes’ Then and Now: Dialogue with the Modern World after Vatican II,” *Origins* 42:34 (2013): 545-551, 549.

dream: the Second Vatican Council was at one and the same time ‘*aggiornamento*’ and ‘*ressourcement*’, an updating and a return to the sources – and it was precisely this tension between present and past that opened up a future for the Church. Hopefully the time has now come to read *Gaudium et spes* with fresh eyes, no longer blinded by the strategy of polarisation which consists in turning the tensions within the text (and the Church) into false opposites.²⁵ The challenge is not to treat the council document as a poor compromise, one that just sticks things on top of each other, or alongside each other, random statements without connection, from which you can pick and choose at will. A good compromise is one that seeks to hold things together that are vital, even though it may not be quite clear yet as to where to go from there. The art is to resist the temptation of polarization, resolving the tensions prematurely by appropriating the text in a truncated way. Only if one accepts the text as a whole and is willing to look at how precisely its tensions can produce vitality can one contribute responsibly to ensuring the future of the compromise that *Gaudium et spes* represented. Thus it appears that the choice between *either* contemporary human experience *or* (Biblical) tradition as the starting point is based on a false dilemma. We should rather uphold the paradox that it is precisely the return to the sources of its own traditions that has enabled the Church to be more open to the world of its time.

2. Brief Analysis of the Term ‘Spirit’ in *Gaudium et spes*

Within polarizing interpretations the methodological impasse between experience and tradition tends to be translated theologically in an opposition between creation (in §36 associated with modern autonomy) and redemption (the Christological anthropology of §22).²⁶ Theologians will note that the entire debate about whether speaking of the world should start out with Creation or with Christ is a typical case of forgetting about the Holy Spirit (*Geistesvergessenheit*). Between the Father, creator and source of all human goodness, and the Son, saviour of a sinful world, there is the Holy Spirit. An analysis of *Gaudium et spes* shows that the Church repeatedly expresses its awareness of being led by the Spirit.²⁷ In line with *Lumen Gentium* (§§ 8 and 15), the Council affirms that the Spirit leads the Church and its members continually to “purify” and “renew themselves” (GS §§ 21, 40, 43). The Spirit leads the Church to ever-greater unity (§§ 40, 42, 43) and to increasing readiness to serve the human community (§3). The Spirit is also the driving force pushing the Church to “hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word” (§44). “[T]he Spirit, far from being held captive within the boundaries of the Church, can be found in the most surprising places.”²⁸ Where the epilogue to *Gaudium et spes* calls for

²⁵ See, e.g., Kevin J. Ahern (ed.), *Visions of Hope: Emerging Theologians and the Future of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), in which young theologians reflect in an uninhibited way upon the meaning of the Council today.

²⁶ Cf. Walter Kasper, “The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Communio ICR* 23 (1996): 129-140, 138: “Ultimately, we cannot expect a council to define systematically the relationship between these terms; this is a task for subsequent theology.” As a response to Kasper’s insightful analysis of the tension between theology of creation and Christology, our article proposes to retrieve the pneumatological dimension in the document.

²⁷ Cf. Aron Fejérdy, *L’Église de l’Esprit du Christ: La relation ordonnée du Christ et de l’Esprit au mystère ecclésial: une lecture de Vatican II* (Fribourg: Fribourg Academy Press, 2014).

²⁸ Hebblethwaite, “The Popes and Politics,” 270.

dialogue with all human beings, with a view to building and bringing the world to fulfillment, it says in relation to non-Christian religions that “we want frank conversation to compel us to receive the *impulses of the Spirit* faithfully and to act on them energetically” (§92).

“Responding to the impulses of the Spirit” (*Impulsionibus Spiritus respondendum* – the Latin title of §11), thus leads the Church outwards:

... led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation... This council, first of all, wishes to assess in this light [of faith] those values which are most highly prized today and to relate them to their divine source. Insofar as they stem from endowments conferred by God on man, these values are exceedingly good. Yet they are often wrenched from their rightful function by the taint in man's heart, and hence stand in need of purification. (§11)

The Church actively goes in search of all possible ways to render the world more humane, because “through the energy of the Spirit [Christ] is *animating, purifying and strengthening* those noble longings too by which the human family makes its life more human” (§38). One of the values that the Church wishes to appreciate and strengthen is the growing recognition of human rights, about which §26 concludes that “God’s *Spirit* ... is not absent from this development.”

3. An Overly Optimistic View of Humanity?

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, but also Karl Rahner and Johann Baptist Metz, have charged that *Gaudium et spes*, with its desire to value developments in the world, displays an unqualified faith in progress.²⁹ They point, for example, to the fact that in the final version of the text, the opening words *Gaudium et luctus, spes et angor* (Joy and sorrow, hope and anxiety) were reversed in order to give the title an unambiguously positive ring. Another example of ‘optimism’ can be seen in the explicit decision not to talk about original sin in §13. The word ‘sin’ as such appears rarely, presumably in reaction to the fixation on sin in classical moral theology. The confidence expressed in *GS* that in our present-day culture we are witnesses to “the birth of a new humanism,” in virtue of which increasing numbers of people seek to “build a better world” (§55), strikes us fifty years later as disturbingly naïve.

Nevertheless, on the whole the text views the human being in a fairly nuanced way.³⁰ The Church is certainly aware of the unprecedented positive opportunities that characterise the modern era, but is also conscious of the pitfalls. There is a genuine sense of crisis (e.g., the

²⁹ See Faggioli, “*The Battle over “Gaudium et Spes”*,” 546-548.

³⁰ Pope John Paul II, who, as the Archbishop of Kraków, was a member of the Council’s subcommission in charge of drafting the text, states that a careful reading allows to appreciate the document as characterized by an attitude, which is not excessively optimistic, but rather to be qualified as “what the 1985 Synod called “the realism of hope” ... that leaves no room for depression nor for paralyzing cynicism, for it knows that the world, in spite of everything, is instilled with that paschal grace which sustains and redeems it.” Pope John Paul II, “Only Christ Can Fulfill Man’s Hopes,” *Communio ICR* 23 (1996): 122-128, 127.

threat of a fatal nuclear war), and of the rising uncertainty and powerlessness that accompany the profound changes in science and society.³¹ The human condition is presented through and through as inwardly divided, torn between contrary movements and impulses, “buffeted between hope and anxiety” (§4). This is the message, for example, in the chapter about peace and international cooperation: “we should not let false hopes deceive us.... But the Church of Christ, present in the midst of the anxiety of this age, does not cease to hope most firmly. She intends to propose to our age over and over again ... ‘now is the acceptable time for a change of heart; ... now is the day of salvation’” (§82). Responding to the impulses of the Spirit is thus a complex exercise for the Church that is not to be confused with a simple adaptation to the spirit of modernity. It is, rather, a multidimensional and reciprocal process of conversion.³² This is evident from the verbs with which the Church expresses its role in the world: “acknowledge, strengthen, encourage, enlighten, unite, purify, restore, save, free” (*Gaudium et spes, passim*). These seem to us to designate the many different ways in which the Spirit works.

III. Globalisation: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology

In the attempt to illustrate the enduring relevance of this conciliar document, we have chosen the topic of ‘globalisation’. The text stands as the quintessential embodiment of the idea that the Council was the “first official self-actualization of a World Church” (Karl Rahner).³³ Although the Church is in principle catholic and hence universal, until Vatican II it pursued, via its missionary work, a policy of speaking *about* the rest of the world. The concrete presence of bishops from all corners of the earth had a significant influence on the Council. Notably in the discussion of the drafts of *Gaudium et spes*, all bishops were closely involved, not only the European ones, as had been the case in previous sessions.³⁴ That does not mean that ultimately this document did not take a primarily Western approach. Insofar as it was an expression of global consciousness, it nevertheless anticipated globalisation, and with its social-ethical reflection can even be regarded as a form of ‘alternative globalization’ *avant la lettre* – since it reflects on how the globalization process should become different in order that all people can enjoy its advantages.

1. Social Personalism

Gaudium et spes is to be read as a conciliar expression of the prophetic vision that also spoke through the social encyclicals of John XXIII. Inspired by the thought of Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain, the pope considered the human person as the “foundation,

³¹ See Philippe Bordeyne, *L’homme et son angoisse: La théologie morale de Gaudium et spes*, Cogitatio fidei, 240 (Paris: Cerf, 2004).

³² Cf. Philippe Bordeyne, “Pour une herméneutique contemporaine de l’anthropologie morale de *Gaudium et spes*,” *Studia Moralia* 50:2 (2012): 311-347.

³³ Rahner quoted in David Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et spes*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. K. R. Himes *et al.* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 285.

³⁴ Tanner, *The Church and the World*, 29.

the cause and the end of every social institution.”³⁵ Based on this personalistic anthropology, *Gaudium et spes* affirms that “the focal point of our total presentation will be man himself” (§3). The second chapter, entitled “The Dignity of the Human Person,” describes the unity of the human being as a bodily subject (§14), endowed with intelligence and wisdom (§15), conscience (§16) and freedom (§17). But first, the social nature of humanity is confirmed – God did not create man as a solitary individual but as male and female: “For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential” (§12). In the following paragraph the document declares that human beings, created in and called to community, are nevertheless marked by sin, as a result of which forming proper relationships is a constant struggle (§13).

2. The Common Good and Human Rights

This anthropology is the foundation based on which human relationships, both intimate ones and social and institutional relations, are evaluated. Applying this principle to social relations, *Gaudium et Spes* continues John XXIII’s approach: as a result of growing worldwide economic and political interdependencies, the bishops confirm the global nature of the social question. Globalisation confirms in practice the universal solidarity that the Church has long proclaimed on the basis of the theology of creation. Globalisation for the first time made the realisation of a worldwide solidarity possible – the Council Fathers regularly used the term ‘human family’ (e.g. §43) in this context – but it also guarantees that conflicts and crises likewise take on a global character. The possibilities seem inexhaustible, but at the same time are limited and unevenly distributed (§4):

the modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or the foulest; before it lies the path to freedom or to slavery, to progress or retreat, to brotherhood or hatred. (§9)

Over against this tension between ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ countries, the bishops emphasize that their ever-growing mutual interdependence brings us face to face with the global nature of the common good (*bonum commune*): around the world we must take account of each other’s needs, rights and duties (§26). The promotion of this general well-being translated in *Gaudium et spes* into the recognition of universal human rights such as the right to food, clothing, shelter, education, work, freedom of expression, etc. The Church values and reinforces these rights, but at the same time wishes to protect them from incorrect interpretations (§§ 26 and 40). Thus David Hollenbach notes how, contrary to an individualistic interpretation of human rights as a means of protecting citizens’ necessary private spheres against oppression by society, the council fathers clearly state that human rights are in the first instance intended to offer the conditions necessary for participation in society and thus for the common good.³⁶ The way in which human rights and the common good are linked here as a result of mutual interdependence – globalisation – is distinctive for the Church’s social teaching. In short, the Catholic vision of humanity emphasizes the last of the three keywords

³⁵ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et magistra*, 1961, § 219.

³⁶ Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et spes*,” 281.

of 'freedom, equality, brotherhood', while modern Western society (in the liberalist and socialist strands) tends to emphasiz[e] one of the first two.

3. Call for Active Solidarity and Concrete Measures

In this respect, *Gaudium et spes* condemns the great economic and social inequalities of our time, not to mention their potential social consequences such as bitterness and threats to peace: "While an immense number of people still lack the absolute necessities of life, some, even in less advanced areas, live in luxury or squander wealth" (§63). The urgent task of Christians to cooperate in development is motivated by the humanist principle of the equal worth of all human beings as well as by a Christological perspective: "the greater part of the world is still suffering from so much poverty that it is as if Christ Himself were crying out in these poor to beg the charity of his disciples" (§88). In this regard, the Council stresses the traditional principle of the universal destination of earthly goods: the goods created and given by God should be in abundance for all in like manner (§69). They belong in the first instance to the whole community, and only secondarily to the individual. Without denying the importance of private property as a condition for autonomy and development (§71), the challenge of fighting global hunger and poverty moved the bishops to cite a text by the Church Fathers: "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you do not feed him, you have killed him" (§69).

In concrete terms, *Gaudium et spes* seeks reforms intended to help promote global socio-economic development. This call is situated within the belief in progress that was typical of that period, when world leaders were convinced that the whole world could attain Western-style development by increased economic growth. Hence the United Nations declared the 1960s to be the "Decade of Development". Essential reforms and measures for implementing worldwide development are formed in cooperation with the 'developing countries' – through structural solutions as well as emergency aid (§84), by providing food supplies, housing, medical care and education, accepting refugees and offering practical, expert and financial aid (§85); an equitable allocation of goods (§86c); a reform in the world economy at the service and under the determination of human beings (§65); setting up institutions for regulating international trade and preventing excessive inequality in power (§86c), etc. *Anno* 2015, the optimism of the 1960s has disappeared. Our rapidly changing climate, for instance, shows that a universal application of the Western development model is practically unsustainable and unachievable, but *Gaudium et spes'* underlying longings are still on the international agenda.

4. Towards a Trinitarian Anthropology?

The present-day context probably requires other concrete measures. Nevertheless, *GS* remains a stimulus for recognising and valuing humanity's potential, more particularly from the perspective of its optimistic anthropology which, although aware of international risks and divisions, nevertheless holds out the aim of universal brotherhood. What could lend this vision further force is a theological deepening of that anthropology. The social nature of human beings and their deep-rooted need for community is given a foundation in the theology of creation: the human person, as male and female, is created in the image of God. At the end

of paragraph 24, furthermore, a new path is opened up. Having first presented the process of growing solidarity among people as a fulfilment of the goal of creation, it goes on to say:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, “that all may be one ... as we are one” (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. (§24)

The remarkable statement is made here that the human community, by its unification, resembles the community of the Trinity. This promising pathway of a Trinitarian anthropology has been gradually elaborated in Catholic social teaching, from the bishops’ synod of 1971 (*On Justice in the World*) up to *Laudato si’* (2015). Within civil society it has been developed, for example, within the innovative reflections about the ‘economy of communion’.³⁷

Thanks to its principles and their translation into practice in the call for reforming global society – including structural solutions within the economic system as well as political cooperation and emergency aid (§84) – *Gaudium et spes* can be seen as a precursor of what would later be called ‘the preferential option for the poor’. Although *Gaudium et spes* says “more about the poor than with them,”³⁸ it contains quite a number of ‘prophetic’ elements. By recognising globalisation on the one hand, and by linking faith and daily life on the other, *Gaudium et spes* inspired believers to take their transformative role in society seriously. In the wake of the Council and under the further urging of Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* two years later, many new movements and organisations were founded to harness human solidarity and structural justice in the struggle against global injustice and inequality. Since the Pastoral Constitution, the topic of globalisation as well as the implications for the Church’s teachings and public role has come to be established as an essential element in the tradition of Catholic social teaching.

Conclusion

Through his words and acts, the current pope leaves us without doubts: faith has a social dimension which belongs to the essential core of its proclamation of the Gospel. His Apostolic Exhortation on evangelisation is telling in this regard. For instance, he reacts more than once against the worldwide consequences of the economic system – as far as it creates and sustains the exclusion of millions of people – and calls Catholics to take seriously the task to search for the Reign of God and its justice, in all its dimensions. The attitude and internal change of heart this requires of the Church is clear:

³⁷ For an investigation on how exactly Catholic social teaching has gradually introduced this Trinitarian anthropology, see Ellen Van Stichel, “Gaudium et spes: From a Personalist to a Trinitarian Anthropology and its Implications for Reflecting on the Global Economy,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 12:2 (2015): 227-244. For the economy of communion, see www.edc-online.org.

³⁸ Donald Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 137.

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37)³⁹.

Almost five decades earlier, *Gaudium et spes* said: "Therefore let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbour and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation" (§43). Based on the text itself, but certainly also on its reception history, it appears that the most important turning-point may well have been the one that gave rise to the Pastoral Constitution: namely, the new awareness that the Church cannot look on indifferently from the sidelines, but must be affected by and engaged in whatever human beings experience and undergo, and must dare to dirty its hands in the mud of history, driven by hope, that wonderful "gift of the Spirit" (§92).

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³⁹ Pope Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2014, § 49.